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The Washington Historical Quarterly

THE PIONEER ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

This issue of *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, being the first of the new year and the beginning of a new volume, is planned as a tribute to the pioneers of Washington. All the articles have been selected with that end in view. In the same spirit this article has been prepared about the State organization of pioneers.

Moved by a desire for fellowship and organization, a call was issued through the newspapers for a meeting of old settlers and, in response to that call, the meeting was held in Columbia Hall, Olympia, on October 10, 1883. John M. Swan was chosen chairman and Robert Frost, secretary.

It was decided to form a pioneer association and a committee, consisting of Dr. N. Ostrander, Benjamin F. Shaw and Captain S. W. Percival, was appointed to draft a constitution.

At that very first meeting there was debated the question as to who would be eligible for membership. The first suggestion limiting the membership to those who had come to the Territory prior to January 1, 1855, and who had resided therein continuously since 1858, was lost. It was then decided to admit all those who had come to the Territory prior to January 1, 1856. The chairman and secretary were then directed to issue a call for all qualified pioneers to meet at Olympia on October 23, 1883.

At that second meeting the constitution was adopted and the following officers were elected: President, A. S. Abernethy; first vice-president, C. C. Hewitt; second vice-president, Benjamin F. Shaw; secretary, John M. Swan; treasurer, G. A. Barnes; directors (with the president, first vice-president and secretary), N. Ostrander and James Longmire. The enrollment of members followed, forty-three being on the first list. A majority of those have since died but the first secretary, Robert Frost, who signed the call for the meetings, is still living at Olympia.

While those meetings are taken as the birth of the State organization, it will be shown later than they were not the first pioneer meetings.

Looking back at those days, it seems likely that the impulse for organization was quickened by the "Last Spike" celebrations of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company in September of that year, 1883. The old settlers correctly reasoned that when passengers could come to the "Oregon Country" in railroad coaches the days of real pioneers were ended. This idea of such an impulse has this interesting evidence: A call was issued for a special meeting at Olympia on April 9, 1884, to consider plans for a great pioneer excursion over the new railroad. At the meeting, Daniel Bagley, C. H. Hale and J. P. Stewart were appointed a committee to confer with the railway officials. John M. Swan, as secretary, then makes this record:

"The committee reported, as the lowest rates the railroad agents would grant, the following: For seventy-five or more persons, from Portland to St. Paul and return, \$100 each; to New York and return, \$140; to Chicago and return, \$114. An emigrant sleeping car was offered the excursionists. The rates were too high and there was no excursion."

While they were disappointed over the plan of retracing the way of their ox-teams and "prairie schooners" in a sleeping car, they had the satisfaction of knowing that their new organization was prospering. The list of forty-three members had expanded to one of two hundred and fifty-four members.

The first annual reunion was held at Olympia on July 3, 1884. The plan of that meeting has been followed more or less closely ever since. The constitution and by-laws were amended. The dues of members and the pay of the secretary were attended to and further meetings were arranged. Entertainment was provided and those who made addresses received a vote of thanks. Another effort was made for an excursion over the new railroad but the secretary records: "This conference resulted precisely as did the first, no lower rates being obtained."

The constitution, as amended and approved at that first annual meeting, called the organization "Washington Pioneer Association." The provision for membership was: "All persons residing in the Territory of Washington prior to January 1, 1860, and all members of or persons eligible to membership in the pioneer organizations of California, Oregon, Idaho and British Columbia, and none others, are eligible to membership in this Association."

The second annual reunion was held in Tacoma on June 16 and

17, 1885. The roll then showed a membership of three hundred and thirty-eight. This time they had a little railroad excursion as guests of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company to the Puyallup Valley. An adjourned meeting was provided for at Tacoma on August 10, 1885. The principal purposes of the meeting were to arrange for changes in the constitution and by-laws and to provide for incorporating the organization.

The third annual reunion was held in Seattle on June 1, 1886, and it was at this meeting that it was shown that the Olympia organization of 1883 was not the first pioneer society. Judge H. G. Struve called attention to the fact that as early as 1871 a pioneer association had been formed in Seattle. That organization had appointed a committee of which Judge Orange Jacobs was chairman and he asked that Judge Jacobs be heard. Judge Jacobs stated that the King County organization had expanded its scope so as to include all pioneers of the Territory. It had been incorporated and all that but the members believed that all pioneers should belong to one organization. The society he represented was ready to be merged into the Washington Pioneer Association if their own members were all received as charter members of the newer organization. The merging of the two societies was accomplished and a committee of three from each society was appointed to prepare the necessary changes in the constitution and by-laws.

The fourth reunion was held at Port Townsend on June 2, 1887; the fifth at Seattle on June 5, 1888; the sixth at Olympia on June 4, 1889. That completes the record down to statehood.

Of late years the meetings and reunions have all been held in Seattle. For this there are several reasons and among them are two of most importance. Judge John J. McGilvra, well known as a pioneer lawyer, died on December 19, 1903. He bequeathed to the Pioneer Association a lot on the shore of Lake Washington near the home in which he had lived for thirty-six years. The anchoring quality of that property was increased by another pioneer—Sarah Loretta Denny. She died on July 25, 1907, and when her will was probated it was found that, among other fine and helpful bequests, she had left for the Pioneer Association enough money to build a large two-story brick structure in which to hold the meetings and reunions. That property thus improved has done much toward stimulating the spirit of loyalty of the pioneers for their State organization.

On December 5, 1895, the society filed articles of incorporation under State laws. The name was changed to "The Pioneer Association of the State of Washington." The cost of membership is purposely

kept from being burdensome. The admission fee is one dollar and dues are one dollar a year for men. Women are free. After the many changes from year to year the present rules provide that persons are eligible who have resided in Washington, Territory and State, for forty years prior to the time of their application for membership.

In many counties of the State there have grown up pioneer organizations. As some of these counties passed through their frontier or pioneer experiences later than others, it is quite natural that such local societies should have membership requirements different from those of the State Association. There has developed, however, a desire for cooperation. On November 22, 1916, the Board of Trustees of the Pioneer Association of the State of Washington adopted a motion to invite each local pioneer society in the State to choose an official delegate to bring or send to the annual meetings in June messages of greeting. Through these delegates the State society can be kept informed about the work of all pioneer associations in the State. It is hoped that this plan will prove mutually helpful.

As in many other organizations, the secretary of the Washington Pioneer Association has been the most important officer. Among those who have served in that capacity are Robert Frost, John M. Swan, Francis Henry, Charles Prosch, Edgar Bryan, Thomas H. Cann and Major W. V. Rinehart. The last named is the present incumbent. His address is 416 Alaska Building, Seattle.

The present officers of the association are as follows: President, Edmond S. Meany; vice-president, George H. Foster; secretary, Major W. V. Rinehart; treasurer, William M. Calhoun; trustees, Frank H. Winslow, chairman; M. R. Maddocks, William H. Pumphrey, James McCombs and Leander Miller.

EDMOND S. MEANY.